



Operation Iraqi Freedom: A Surgeon's Perspective

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During a sophomore medical school lecture I clearly recall being told that the only person who ever benefits from war is the surgeon. It sounded rather bold, masculine, and right up my alley since I had already decided to be a surgeon as early as junior college. I suppose that is why I have always remembered that comment for almost 30 years. Or maybe it was because the guy who said it was a real geek. I could never quite reconcile where he came about that bit of treasured knowledge that only a macho surgeon should know. I'm still not sure about those particulars but I recently found myself as one of those surgeons mentioned.

Far from being a medical student, I was a 54-year-old vascular surgeon in the Navy practicing in San Diego. Since 11 September 2001, I had the experience of serving on USS *Enterprise* (CVN-65) as she launched the first strikes into Afghanistan and most recently being deployed to Kuwait and Iraq for 5 months.

In January 2003 nearly 200 personnel from Naval Medical Center San Diego reported to the First Marine Expeditionary Force at Camp Pendleton for the purpose of providing surgical support to the large operational combat force. Three general surgeons, one vascular surgeon, as well as two orthopedic surgeons, podiatrists, oral surgeons, and a gynecological specialist made up the corps surgical team. Nine non-surgical physicians as well as six dental officers, two psychologists, a psychiatrist, and a chaplain completed the team. Twenty-four nurses and more than a 100 corps staff and 32 Marines joined us as support. We left Camp Pendleton in early February and flew from March Air Force Base to Kuwait.

After several hours, we arrived in northern Kuwait at the logistical support area base called LSA Coyote near the Iraqi border. Fortunately, we had tents to stave off what was surprisingly cold weather, especially at night when we slept fully dressed. We had been issued 9mm Beretta side arms with ammunition, as well as flak jackets, Kevlar helmets, a variety of undergarments, mosquito netting, sleeping bags, and canteens.

By no means were we completely unprepared. We had been assigned to this "platform" long before and had trained for such desert operations. Two other surgical companies joined us and we became the Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie surgical companies, each given a specific surgical mission for the upcoming war. I was assigned as chief of the medical staff of Alpha Company, and we promptly unloaded 212,000 pounds of our gear from large metal shipping containers off flatbed trucks. In less than 24 hours we stood up what is known as a level 2 combat surgical hospital. This was my first sense that the essence of teamwork was going to be defined over and over again in this mission.

We received our first surgical case within hours of turning on the first 200kw generator. On one of our six operating room tables, we saw two of the biggest peritonsillar abscesses we had ever drained. Within days, an errant M16 round shattered a leg, which required surgery. Within hours, we also diagnosed a case of acute appendicitis, and operated on the Marine. We fully engaged in providing surgical care to over 25,000 Marines and coalition forces in the only Navy hospital in Kuwait, seeing more than 900 patients and performing 24 surgeries even before the beginning of the war.

All the while, we conducted 24 mass casualty drills. The shrill whistle signaling incoming casualties was a common occurrence. We drilled for the smooth flow of severely wounded from the landing zone a half-mile away all the way through the postoperative ward. These exercises emphasized all scenarios from dealing with retained ordnance, threatening POWs, chemical assault, compartment syndromes, and pulmonary emboli. Our camaraderie and confidence grew exponentially at Alpha Surgical Company. We would need every bit of it as 20 March arrived with a roar.

Operation Iraqi Freedom Begins

With no TV, usable phones, and internet and mail being non functional for the most part, we only knew what our intelligence briefs had confirmed. War was imminent. Convoys had been driving by Camp Okinawa (the 2-acre plot where Alpha Company was stood up) for 3 days without a break. Marine generals were dropping by for "tours" of our hospital more frequently. I believe it was for that last minute "warm fuzzy" of knowing we were ready for their soon to be bleeding Marines. I made sure we had enough type O blood on hand, our walking blood bank was ready to make up for any shortfalls, and our anesthesia machines were stocked with enough Forane for unlimited use.

The night before the war started, we experienced the first of 36 scud missile attacks. These attacks sent us diving for cover into 8-foot-deep bunkers. So much to remember. Gas masks on, gas masks off when the “all clear” signal is given. Don’t run in the pitch dark or you will find yourself impaled on an angulated tent stake aiming at your lower abdomen. Know the password of the day, or the sentry will shoot. Alpha Company fostered no misconceptions now, as Silkworm missiles impacted a few miles away. Our commanding general enlightened me that it took 123 seconds for a scud missile launched in Basra to impact at Alpha Company. My desire to appear “in the know” was slightly less than my desire not to terrify the company, so I never shared that bit of information until days later.

The next morning the first CH-46 helicopter arrived with several wounded onboard. One was an Iraqi officer with a large open defect behind his knee from an M16 round. He was white as a sheet and tachycardic, but I saw a clear save here if we could get some blood into him. Multiple IV attempts by the best of us failed. As we exposed the saphenous vein for cannulation, he arrested and died from prolonged hemorrhagic shock.

The same ambulance carried a Marine officer. He was dead, shot through the abdomen, with the round exiting his lower back. I had to enter the ambulance to record the injuries. I had seen plenty of dead, having trained in a trauma center. But this was a “good guy,” not some gang banger from an inner city neighborhood. It didn’t quite fit. I noticed the quiet as he and I shared the inside of the ambulance. I would feel this disconnect many times in the next few weeks.

C-130s joined the helicopters to bring in the wounded. It was controlled chaos. Calm determination described our hospital company. All were committed; all were somewhat numbed. No one complained; they just worked. They all had the same blank look on their faces. They all remembered the young officer. There was no more rationalizing, no more denials. This was war, and no one faltered.

We received a group of Marines and a Navy corpsman. All had leg injuries from landmines. The corpsman triggered a mine while running to the aid of one of his injured Marines. Their muscular legs were horrifically deformed and shredded. Under the tent lights, the shrapnel glistened and reflected from inside their wounds. The Marines were quietly answering questions, polite and dignified. Even their injuries and pain didn’t keep them from saying “Yes ma’am, no ma’am” or “Yes sir, no sir.”

The general surgeon met with the orthopedist for an ad hoc discussion about immediate amputation versus limb salvage in some of these cases. I had started this policy a few weeks earlier to ensure all amputations were deemed the best option with the agreement of at least two surgeons. Two Marines and the Navy corpsman left the resuscitation area for the OR. Their legs would have to be amputated.

Four hours earlier in southern Iraq, a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) interrupted a smoke break in the cab of a 7-ton truck, hitting the three Marines inside. Two arrived with shrapnel in their eyes and necks but not serious enough to warrant immediate surgery. Their master sergeant had open head wounds, skull fractures, and was not arousable. He was intubated. He went to surgery, bleeding profusely from the head and face. The OR team arrested the bleeding and, while still intubated, staff took him to a Blackhawk helicopter. He would see an Army neurosurgeon within 2 hours and undergo more surgery. Later, we heard he had survived.

A helicopter dropped off several Marines ambushed while taking an Iraqi surrender. Nine of their fellow “devil dogs” were dead.

An RPG killed a 26-year-old corpsman from our hospital. Many of the Alpha Company staff knew him from San Diego. He had two children and a wife. Alpha Company began to hurt, but the numbness quickly disappeared. It had to. There was more work to be done.

A friendly fire injury brought in more Marines. One escaped three burning vehicles, only to be badly injured by 30mm fire from our own A-10 Warthogs. His treatment included an exploratory lap, a colostomy, and debridement of buttock and flank wounds prior to being medevaced.

An Army soldier arrived after being shot through the left thigh; he had no pulses. I joked with him about checking for proper HMO authorization. He laughed loudly. His artery was grafted and regained its pulse. One hour after surgery, he was evacuated.

As we left for the OR, stretcher bearers lifted a Marine behind me for his journey to surgery. He looked down from the stretcher at the large puddle of blood underneath and apologized to the nurse for leaving a mess behind. He said his mother taught him always to clean up after himself. Looking at his face, it was clear it could not have been all that long ago. He appeared barely 18. I asked myself “Where do these young men come from? What makes them able to do this?”

How does the Marine Corps find them amongst all others?" At this point I took my one and only trip to the "time out" box. I needed to take some deep breaths out in the cool night to regain composure before surgery. While this young man was losing his leg a Saddam Fedeyeen arrived. A very serious Marine stood over him with an M16.

Treatment for this enemy patient turned out to be uncomplicated. A Marine sharpshooter had previously placed a shot through his left eye which exited a large defect on the side of his head. I had a quick consultation with our Catholic Dominican chaplain and the patient was made comfortable. He arrived in "martyr's heaven" early in the morning while most of us were curled up on or under racks (cots), anywhere we could find them.

The incoming patients continued for 5 to 6 days. As the war moved north, and Bravo and Charlie surgical companies arrived in Iraq, our activity lessened.

From the "front" we received many walking wounded and some of those operated upon by our sister companies. The number of patients arriving with horrific injuries decreased, as did the unannounced arrival of dead soldiers and Marines. Emergency surgeries stopped almost as quickly as they started a week earlier.

Nevertheless, terrible weapons accidents, as well as some heartbreaking suicides still occurred. Tired young men crashed their trucks. No one wore seat belts as there was a morbid fear of being trapped after an RPG attack and not being able exit the vehicles. Weapons at the ready are hard to use when confined by a seat belt.

Some personnel were just careless. In quiet rage, I noted their mangled bodies and considered how they made it through the war, only to die in an accident. Seeing the carnage still occurring after combat operations were over was very difficult for Alpha Company.

By late April, we thought free passes or "get out of jail free" cards should have been distributed. But it was not to be. Painful, albeit irregular, events plagued us. The Combat Stress Team and chaplains worked 24 hours a day, 7 days a week dealing with Alpha Company's many heroes. Even though the superlative performance of so many young people was remarkable, it was preposterous to think that anyone could get through this experience without serious emotional and spiritual wounds. Some had never seen a dead body, certainly not someone their own age. Many of us with children had to sort out what we had experienced and how these events might affect them. Over the years, the replays will become uninvited and unwelcome guests. And we will all have to deal with them.

Early on, we dealt with our our feelings privately. Then small groups formed up to discuss things, in most cases indirectly. No one wanted to awaken the sleeping monster yet, just whisper a bit and get some relief and sleep. One day, it seemed, we all had the same epiphany. We discussed things, and, since then, we haven't again spoken about the most painful events. There just wasn't anything else to say. Even now, I cannot describe the feelings, so it's best not to speak about it anymore. Perhaps later the words will come. I feel everyone's journey will be different.

The Iraqi People

In May I accompanied the commanding general, of "123 seconds" fame and assisted with medical affairs throughout Iraq and Kuwait. I was impressed by the infrastructure already in place. As opposed to Afghanistan, Iraq has much of what it needs. It just doesn't work. I saw the opulence of Saddam's palaces next to the harsh environs of his people. Children and teenagers jumped up and down on the streets happily when we drove by in convoy. Many adults looked at us blankly or with open hostility. Most of the Iraqis I interacted with are pleasant. The father of a severely injured 12-year-old boy we cared for taught me much about the people and how they feel. This date farmer, who actually held an MBA, now loves the three Navy doctors who cared so much for his son, even though he was very angry and hostile in the first days. I couldn't blame him.

Perhaps nation building starts with the healing of people, one by one, heart by heart. I never wandered about alone when I was in their cities. I was always armed with a pistol and sometimes an M16. True, meaningful social interaction is sharply stunted when you dress like this. But it was essential in the towns near Baghdad. Interestingly, about the time you think they all want you dead, a few people will walk up, as they did to me and say, "Thank you America. . . thank you George Bush." I feel whoever gives them water, fuel, and electricity will always have their gratitude. They are very intelligent people, proud but dreamless, damaged by Saddam and other elements for so long. They love their children as we do ours. There are no great differences between moms and dads no matter where you live. The real future of Iraq, I believe, lies within the hearts of those kids jumping and dancing in the street. I hope they get a government that allows them the freedom to dream. I hope also that someday they will never forget the hundreds of young Marines, Sailors, and Soldiers who sacrificed their future and died in Iraq so these children could have those dreams fulfilled.





U.S. Shock-Trauma Platoons Put Emergency Room in Iraq: Units Treat Marines, Civilians, Prisoners

by James W. Crawley

http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/iraq/marines/20030417-9999_1n17medics.html. 17 April 2003.

BAGHDAD, Iraq—The man, his face wrapped with duct tape, his torso marked by dozens of purplish-black bruises, was dumped at a Marine Corps checkpoint in northwest Baghdad.

His attackers said he had opened fire on a crowd of civilians, who then caught and beat him.

Navy corpsmen pulled the tape from the moaning Iraqi and began examining his injuries.

“It looks like he met Mr. Ax Handle,” said Lt. Cmdr. William Cupo, a Navy emergency-room doctor from Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Cupo is in charge of Shock Trauma Platoon 4, which has been treating Marines from Camp Pendleton and Iraqi prisoners and civilians since the war began last month. The 20 medical personnel are from military hospitals in North Carolina and Florida.

Many of the wounded Marines have been cared for by small units of doctors and medical workers assigned to several such platoons—portable emergency rooms designed to stabilize patients before they are airlifted to field hospitals farther in the rear.

During a recent two-day period, Cupo’s group treated more than a dozen Marines and Iraqis who had suffered injuries such as internal bleeding, third-degree burns, broken bones, cuts, dehydration, and gunshot and shrapnel wounds.

“If they get to our door, we take care of them,” Cupo said.

The doctors wear flak jackets and sidearms. Marines guard captured Iraqis as medical personnel perform their work.

“It’s a challenge for the staff (to treat prison-

ers),” Cupo said. “Six or seven hours ago, he wanted to kill us.”

Cupo strode around the platoon’s treatment tent with his hands grasping the armholes of his protective vest, supervising corpsmen as they administered morphine and started intravenous fluids.

Grabbing a laptop-size ultrasound machine, Cupo moved a transducer over the beaten man’s abdomen. Resting the monitor on his left hip, the doctor ran the sensor back and forth, looking for any internal bleeding.

Cupo and his colleague, Dr. Troy Borema, also a Navy lieutenant commander, suspected the man, whose name was never learned by the Marines, had internal bleeding, possibly from a damaged liver or spleen.

It wasn’t known why he fired into the crowd. Some suggested the man was a Baath Party member, or perhaps a militiaman or Republican Guard member.

But because the unit doesn’t have a surgeon and a fully equipped operating room, it was decided to airlift the prisoner to a Navy field hospital south of Baghdad.

The trauma platoon has been handling injured Marines, said Chief Petty Officer Torsak Vimoktyon, a senior Navy corpsman.

“We’ve been fortunate that we haven’t had a lot of wounded,” he said

Platoons like this one are a middle link in a sophisticated system to treat the sick, injured or wounded. Traveling in a small convoy of Humvees, the units can be moved close to the action.

Along with battalions aid stations and resuscitation units, called Forward Resuscitating Surgical Suites, the platoons are steppingstones for the wounded on their way to Navy surgical companies—small field hospitals dozens of miles farther back—and large hospital complexes in Kuwait and offshore, aboard the Navy hospital ship Comfort.

On the battlefield, corpsmen moving with the Marines are usually the first medical personnel to treat the wounded. Those requiring more care are taken to a battalion aid station. Some go to a shock-trauma platoon, like No. 4

Then, after evaluation and stabilization, helicopters fly them to better-equipped medical units.

If the wound is very serious, the patient can be evacuated from the field directly to a resuscitation surgical suite.

Trauma platoons use two inflatable tents that fold up into the back of specially built Humvees. Because the tents are designed to withstand chemical attack, stretchers are moved into the tent through an airlock, and medical personnel must enter through a double-door hatch with sprayers to decontaminate people.

Within a few minutes of a trauma platoon’s arrival at a location, blowers inflate the tents, and the unit can be treating patients within an hour of being set up.

While every battalion has two doctors with just a year or two of experience, shock-trauma platoons such as Cupo’s have two board-certified physicians, usually with extensive emergency-room experience.

The shock-trauma platoon is made up of active-duty doctors and corpsmen. Just before the war, they were assigned to this platoon and met only days before flying to Kuwait, Vimoktyon said.

There were some growing pains at first, like learning how to work together to erect

the inflatable tents, the Navy chief said. But now the relationship between officers and enlisted men is relaxed.

“We’ve worked well together,” Vimokytton said.



Fleet Hospital Three Makes Navy Medical History in Sands of Southern Iraq

Chief Journalist Al Bloom, USN, and Rod Duren

Navy Medicine, July-August 2003.

The responsibility of providing casualty care during Operation Iraqi Freedom has taken on a new look. While care is still delivered in the traditional manner by battlefield corpsmen and field surgery units, the men and women of Fleet Hospital Three (FH-3)—beginning 1 April—added to the lifesaving capabilities of Navy medicine by constructing the Navy’s first Expeditionary Medical Facility (EMF) in a war zone.

“I am truly impressed with the way the Fleet Hospital has come together here,” said the Commanding General of the First Force Service Support Group (1st FSSG) BGEN E.G. Usher shortly after FH-3 started seeing patients.

“The teamwork displayed to get this great facility up and running and operationally capable, while almost simultaneously starting to see patients, has been amazing.”

“The result a significant increase in our ability to save lives,” said CAPT Peter F. O’Connor, Fleet Hospital Three commanding officer.

FH-3 was a 9-acre, 116-bed Echelon III facility manned by more than 300 medical service support personnel and Construction Battalion personnel.

“Echelon One is the treatment provided in the field by our physicians and corpsmen who travel and risk their lives on the front lines,” explained HMCM (FMF/SW) Don L. Nelson. “Without their efforts, our work would be all but impossible.”

Even after receiving treatment from a field corpsman, a service member can receive care from an Echelon II facility known as a Force Service Support Group Surgical Company, but these companies, while mobile and capable of providing vital surgical capabilities, are not nearly as robust as a fleet hospital.

“When we arrived at Camp Viper, the folks attached to Charlie Surgical Company, (Force Service Support Group, First Marine Expeditionary Force) were busy receiving patients,” said FH-3 Executive Officer, CAPT John S. Gibson, who lead the advance party move from Camp Luzon, Kuwait, into southern Iraq to start construction of the fleet hospital. That trip was through a sand storm that turned a 5-hour trip into a half-day, blinding excursion. “We all knew Charlie Company was getting ready to move forward to keep pace with our forces.”

Getting to work meant the Seabees would begin surveying and grading the desert site. Upon completion, the remainder of the FH-3 staff would begin erecting tents and placing and installing equipment ranging from surgery and x-ray suites to crews’ living quarters and galley.

Treating “all” patients

As FH-3 completed its medical/surgical assignment during the latter days of May, the staff had seen more than 600 patients and performed more than 315 surgeries. FH-3 had provided compassionate care to all, including lifesaving support for Operation Iraqi Freedom, and tangible battlefield benefits.

“We arrived here knowing full well that we’d be needed,” said CAPT O’Connor. “We also knew that we’d be treating all comers. We were to take care of everyone in need of our care . . . it’s what we do.”

“We treated all patients regardless of their nationality” said HM2 Connie Martini, “To tell you the truth, there have been times when [Iraqi patients] were obviously untrusting and a little combative,” said the ICU corpsman.

“One patient in particular came in and clearly didn’t trust us,” added HM2 Martini. “He had a pretty bad attitude and even went as far as pulling out his IVs. But by the time he left, he saw firsthand that we were really here to help. He wrote down a note that we had translated. ‘Saddam bad: America good.’ That note meant a lot,” she said.

“Right now we’re one of only two Echelon III hospitals in the entire country of Iraq,” said CAPT Gibson describing the robust capabilities available at FH-3. “The majority of hospitals here are located in Baghdad, and considering how hard they’ve been hit by looting and the war, it’ll take some time until they’re back on their feet and capable of receiving patients like they were.”

"That said," added CAPT Gibson, "the southern part of Iraq didn't have much in terms of hospitals prior to the war. The Iraqi people need our assistance. We're the best they've got right now."

Considering what FH-3 brings to the table it may indeed be the best hospital currently in Iraq. After constructing the \$12 million facility in the desert, FH-3 personnel brought their mix of expertise to bear.

"We've got a strong mix," said HMCM (FMF/SW) Nelson. "The vast majority of our folks, whether in casualty receiving, x-ray or surgery, nursing and in our (laboratory), were hand picked."

"We're capable in providing several different disciplines in surgery," said FH-3 Director of Surgical Services, CAPT Charles Reese. "We have specialists in neurosurgery, ophthalmology, orthopedics, a vascular surgeon, and I'm an ENT (ear, nose and throat) specialist. Plus, we also have some outstanding general surgeons."

Specialty shortage

Unfortunately, one other specialty area available at FH-3 has been busier than anyone desired. "We've got a pediatrician who has seen more than his fair share of patients," said FH-3 Director of Medical Services, CAPT Bob Hoyt. "Many children arrived with families, and to see them going through that sort situation and trying to make the best of it was moving. The way our staff responded, it was easy to see that they weren't just folks in a modern facility. They were doing their best to ensure there was a healing process," said the NH Pensacola internal medicine specialist.

"We had one child with a shrapnel wound to the foot that virtually everyone fell in love with," said FH-3 pediatrician, LT Carlos Williams, "We've got a lot of parents out here. That parental love crosses all lines. The love of a child allows us to recognize our common ground," Dr. Williams pointed out.

"This hospital is our only hope," said Dr. Hassan Ali, an Iraqi physician who accompanied a 12-year-old boy from Baghdad to the fleet hospital. The youngster suffered wounds to both legs and chest when a piece of ordnance exploded while he was playing with it. "Our hospitals are all unable to see patients," he said. "The doctors have all fled in fear that looters will hurt them in order to take drugs and medical supplies.

"It's harder because you want to be able to do something to soothe the children," explained operating room technician, HM2 Bradley Gann. "They're disoriented, in a place often by themselves, and we have a hard time communicating.

"Even when they arrive with family, the parents are often apprehensive," added the corpsman. "We had one little girl with a bullet wound and the father was here. But he had a hard time trusting us. We were able to communicate through an interpreter that his daughter's well-being was the most important thing to us. It really hit home, because I have a son who is about her age."

"I hold the care of the sick and injured to be a privilege and a sacred trust . . ." reads the Hospital Corpsman Oath. Maybe it's not really that difficult to reconcile the treatment of battlefield casualties regardless of nationality after all.

Training, training . . . and training

"Our folks went through more than a week of hands-on training at FHOTC (Fleet Hospital Operations and Training Center) in Camp Pendleton, CA," said HMCM (FMF/SW) Nelson. "Then we successfully completed a 3-day Operational Readiness Exercise (ORE). We had to be sure we were capable of putting the hospital together once we arrived in country. We are our own construction work force."

Adding the two training evolutions together, FH-3 personnel garnered more than 70,000 man-hours of training. After years of planning, training, and pre-positioning, there was still one more integral role to be played to ensure the successful build of FH-3.

"The construction of any fleet hospital would be impossible without Construction Battalions," said CAPT O'Connor. "From the preparation of our initial camp in Kuwait and their driving our equipment through a blinding sand storm in the advance party to the non-stop, 24-hour days they put in once we arrived in Iraq, our Seabees from CBU 412 and CBU 402 have done a magnificent job." "Bottom line, this has been a shining example of the definition of teamwork, added CAPT O'Connor. "I've said it before to our families. This is the best fleet hospital in the Navy and I'm proud to be a part of it."

Twenty-eight days after receiving orders; 24 days after flying to Kuwait; 7 days after traveling through a blinding sand storm; 5 days after beginning construction in the desolate environment of the Iraqi desert; and 2 days after treating their first patient, Fleet Hospital Three took a moment to extend their pride in teamwork homeward. In a brief ceremony they reflected on their accomplishment and raised a flag that had flown over Naval Hospital Pensacola to signify the strong bond between everyone in Navy medicine, whether at home or in the field.

Then . . . they went back to work.

Upon opening for business 1 April, “the surgeons were operating 24/7 during that first week. It was non-stop,” said CAPT Pam Roark, head of nursing.

“The nurses were working 12-hour shifts yet it’s been the most rewarding experience in my nursing career,” said the 22-year Navy Nurse Corps officer.

After the first weeks of war, FH-3 was “surprised” and nearly overwhelmed with civilian patients and enemy prisoners of war, including women and children, some of whom had purportedly been used as human shields.

LCDR Suzanne Timmer, a pulmonary critical care physician, saw no faces of an enemy, but said the sole purpose of her being with FH-3 was “to take care of people just as I do at home.”

“FH-3 must have done a miraculous job. No U.S. or Coalition Forces’ injuries were fatal.

Some of the wounded soldiers that came into FH-3 had significant combat injuries, said CAPT Roark with an awe-inspiring hint to her voice, “but their only concern was about getting back to their units. . . not talking about going home.”

Language and children

There were several experiences FH-3 staff had involving children and families and an initial misunderstanding based on language.

“We had placed a child on a ventilator to transport to a Kuwaiti children’s hospital,” said Dr. Timmer. “We’d gotten the child into an ambulance, the father was following, and the equipment died.”

The doctors placed the child into a different ambulance, with a working ventilator, and sped off quickly for Kuwait.

“The look in his eyes told me what he was thinking,” said LCDR Timmer, “that his daughter had died . . . and I didn’t have the skills of speaking the language to explain it initially.”

CAPT Roark had a different experience with an Iraqi man who had been helping the U.S. troops with information. He was later shot in the arm by soldiers when he failed to heed warnings because he hadn’t heard them, she said. The medical team had to amputate his arm above the elbow.

“I told him I felt very badly that he had lost his arm,” said CAPT Roark. “He said his family had not known freedom for more than 35 years, and that he would gladly give his other arm for freedom.”

“Ground zero for nation building”

LT Dallas Braham, a Navy nurse and reservist, who was recalled to active duty in February, has spent the past 11 weeks as part of Navy medicine’s historical FH-3.

He hadn’t given much thought to the “historical” aspects of being the first EMF in a combat zone or the “austere living and working conditions we were in and level of care we provided,” he said recently as the command prepared to complete its duties in southern Iraq as a combat field hospital.

“Until then, we simply had a task to perform and we have done it extraordinarily well,” said the ICU nurse. “We have shown that several aspects of Navy medicine can meld together to be the immediate support for the ‘pointy end of the spear.’

“We are not warriors,” he continued, “but through our care, we have provided tactical support and have been, as one of my close friends said: ‘ground zero for nation building.’”

FH-3, through the trust it has built among the citizenry, has saved many lives outside the hospital and “some patients’ lives and outlooks within the hospital have even begun to be rebuilt,” said LT Braham. “Our success here will change the course of Navy medicine in the field,” said the 40-year-old Navy nurse.

In describing one of the more moving experiences while being a part of FH-3, LT Braham, the father of three young children, said the most difficult aspect of the deployment has been “caring for the wounded children. It was tough on me.”

“I spent several hours one night caring for a young girl who had received a gunshot wound to the head, reportedly from celebratory gunfire near the city of Basra soon after the liberation of that area began,” the critical care nurse continued.

“Through an interpreter, I spent much of that time conversing with her father as I hovered over his daughter. We spoke of our families and how protective we were of our daughters,” said LT Braham who had missed the birth of his third child while deployed.

“Through him, I think I got my greatest affirmation of our purpose to care for their wounds and for our forces to liberate these good people from the tyrant that has ruled over them.”

Part V

Stability and Support Operations



Tikrit, South to Babylon

by Brigadier General John F. Kelly

Marine Corps Gazette, February 2004.

Major combat operations ended in Iraq during April 2003. Marine and coalition forces, however, were just entering into Phase IV of the operation. This phase—security and stabilization operations—has received little attention. Following is the first of a three-part series providing details about 1st Marine Division's Phase IV operations.

I would imagine that by now the readership has been fully exposed to the specifics of the 1st Marine Division's (1st MarDiv's) attack across Mesopotamia to Baghdad, Tikrit, Bayji, and beyond. As I have only just returned from the theater, I am behind in my professional reading and do not know what I have missed in terms of the operations treatment in the literature. By now I would suppose that all are somewhat aware of a plan that focused on speed—indeed, in generating so much speed that the resulting tempo would itself, in reality, be a weapon. It was also a plan that depended on mental and physical agility, multiple thrusts, bypassing resistance, reinforcing success wherever it was achieved, and creating chaos—then thriving on that chaos. Every commander was expected to be at the point of decision, not to micromanage events but to feel the battle and be in a position to exploit even the smallest successes that are always fleeting. Additionally, it looked to set conditions so ambiguous that enemy commanders, from small units in bunkers strung along the border to Saddam himself, would not understand what was taking place. That their every reaction, like the French in 1940, might in fact be the right one at the time they made the decision, but would also be irrelevant as our pace of operations had made it so. Logistically the division's "log dogs," heroes all to include our embedded Combat Service Support Group 11 (CSSG-11), pushed materiel and themselves to the limit—and did not wait to be asked. They were also innovative, and we deployed with fuel test kits in every unit to live off the land and use Saddam's stocks if need be, and we did occasionally, just to say we could. We never ran out of food although there were a few minor, local "crises" at the end, but ammunition and fuel win. The entire division understood that getting there fast was far more important than arriving with full stomachs.

We were ordered into the attack early and unexpectedly on 20 March 2003. The division, over 22,000 strong and with 8,000 vehicles, met the timeline. Two very powerful regimental combat teams (RCTs) attacked directly into the Ramaylah oilfields, while a third moved toward the critical road and bridge network just



south of An Nasiriyah astride the Euphrates River. The Marine expeditionary force's (MEF's) second division, 1st United Kingdom (1st UK), was attacking on the right focused on Basra. The basic plan had an amazing amount of flexibility built in, and just as importantly, commanders and staff throughout the division had so socialized every eventuality that an audible was all it took to redirect an action or execute the unexpected. With an apparent focus on Iraq's most productive oilfield and facilities, one can only wonder if Saddam really did think it was all about oil. Worst case from his perspective might have been that if the invasion continued it would follow the failed British 1915 example making its way along the Tigris River-Highway 6 corridor from Basra to Baghdad. His defensive dispositions certainly suggested this was his expectation, and the MEF avoided them. What could not have been readily apparent to him or his generals was that while the three RCTs and 1st UK were taking the oilfields and associated infrastructure intact, Task Force (TF) Tarawa was already closing on An Nasiriyah and the Euphrates crossings. They also could not have known that the soldiers of the 3d Infantry Division (3d ID), "The Rock of the Marne," were out of Kuwait attacking northwest through the flat and uninhabited desert toward the capital.

Readers might be aware that after the "opening gambit" we executed a rapid relief in place with 1st UK in the oilfields, reoriented west, and by 23-24 March, after rearming and refitting in stride along Highway 1, were pushing furiously across the Euphrates. Both RCT-5 and RCT-7 would cross the Euphrates west of An Nasiriyah, while RCT-1 crossed through the eastern edge of the urban area moving directly north on Highway 7. From this point on, the attack, with the exception of an unexpected and unneeded pause, would not slow until 9 April when all three RCTs isolated Baghdad east and north of the city. Neither of the two divisions (1st MarDiv and 3d ID) were ever in favor of taking ground by a series of armored raids, then withdrawing. I cannot speak for the 3d ID, but we very definitely had our own ideas and very strong feelings in this regard and had no intention of ever again surrendering ground taken.

In reality the division's effort in the conventional stage of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) continued even after Baghdad's fall. With nothing more than a verbal from the I MEF, in well under a day TF Tripoli was organized and on 13 April attacked to Tikrit. Combining all three light armored reconnaissance battalions for the first time ever; an artillery battalion in 5th Battalion, 11th Marines (5/11); a detachment of SEALs; and CSS and Marine wing support squadrons elements, Tripoli stole out of the capital under the cover of darkness attacking over 100 miles north to seize Saddam's hometown. A few days later the attack, this time conducted very gently, pushed an additional 45 kilometers to take the surrender and enjoy the hospitality of the city of Baiji delivered up by the enthusiastic inhabitants of the region. At this point the MEF battlespace extended some 900 kilometers from its start point in Kuwait and, in fact, Tripoli was closer to the Mediterranean or Black Sea than the Persian Gulf.

The division's main effort along Highway 1 has received the lion's share of discussion. I thought, however, for a view of how the plan was designed and executed, RCT-1's efforts (Highway 7) might provide another perspective. The battlespace was more swamp than desert and was a maze of thousands of irrigation ditches—all significant impediments to vehicular movement. The division moved in multiple thrusts with RCT-1 separated from the main body by 65 miles. Once the RCT had successfully negotiated a stressful passage of lines through TF Tarawa, forcing a crossing of the Euphrates River at An Nasiriyah, it followed a line directly north on Route 7 toward Al Kut. The Baghdad Division of the Republican Guard (RG) defended the city, but we had no intention of fighting in Al Kut. We were also not concerned about another division, the 10th Armored, 65 miles to the east of RCT-1 at Al 'Amarah.

With little regard for its flanks, RCT-1 cut loose entirely from its support base south of the Euphrates. Moving north, with speed as its primary metric, it pushed into one of the most densely populated regions of Iraq fighting through numerous urban-based ambushes. The RCT was not tasked to reduce or eliminate resistance in detail but, rather, to threaten Al Kut and fix enemy forces in the city. It could take this risk for two reasons, one of which was the innovative use of the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion as a maneuver battalion, and also to screen the RCT's eastern flank as required. Among many missions, to include taking its turn in maneuvering against urban ambushes along Highway 7, the battalion stood ready to detect any thrust from the east and call in hell as delivered by the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (3d MAW), and this was the second reason.

Although in the MEF—and not division zone—we could only hope the 10th Armored would be lured out of its prepared positions. An armored force attacking along the very canalized axis into the division's flank would have triggered the preplanned swarming of 3d MAW. The result would surely have been a “highway of death” all the way back to the enemy's original defenses. The lesson again is that there is nothing you cannot accomplish, no risk too great, if you have Marine air on station not only in a close support role, but working the zone “deep” as well for the Marine air-ground task force commander. As it was, these units—both the 10th Armored and Baghdad Divisions—received virtually nonstop attention by the MAW and other coalition assets and, as it turned out, were either dead, happy to remain stationary, and a long way from their vehicles—or they would desert.

By D+6 Saddam certainly had surmised that 1st UK's attack on Basra was to capture that city, and the expected attack up Highway 6 was not to materialize. He must have known powerful mechanized forces moving on Baghdad along three of the four avenues of approach from the south threatened him, all sidestepping his Highway 6 defenses. Without knowing which units, he certainly must have been aware that the coalition was speeding toward him on Highways 8 (V Corps), 1, and 7 (I MEF). He could not have guessed, however, that the Marines would soon turn almost 90 degrees east along Highway 27 toward An Numaniyah and grab, almost in a coup de main, the Tigris crossings upstream of Al Kut. This maneuver would “shoot the gap” identified early on by the division between the powerful artillery assets of the Baghdad Division in Al Kut and the Al Nida RG Division north on the approaches to Baghdad. Most of these systems were generally of greater range capability than our own—and also chemical capable—always a major concern during the conflict. This move also set the division up to threaten Baghdad from the east and north and, just as importantly, isolate it from possible reinforcement by RG divisions positioned near Tikrit, Mosul, and Kirkuk.

All of this I am confident has been addressed in articles and perhaps even books by now. What I am sure has not been documented, however, is the phase of OIF that evolved from 10 to 20 April when the division repositioned from its Phase III to Phase IV positions in the south. This was the phase in which we formally transitioned from conventional military operations to security and stabilization operations (SASO). In reality this phase began long before the repositioning with the establishment of a division civil-military operations center (CMOC) in Baghdad, organized by the 11th Marine Regiment (artillery). The CMOC was up and functioning even before hostilities ended as it was clear that some form of civil control was required amidst the chaos of looting, retribution, and crime. Even in faraway Tikrit the emphasis had quickly shifted from combat operations to the reestablishment of police, civil services, and production and distribution of potable water. I also do not think that there is a full appreciation for the environment in which we fought after assuming the zone, through the departure of the last battalion in early October. It was tough, stressful, and dangerous work in humidity and heat that climbed steadily until it peaked in August at 130-plus degrees! In addition to repairing infrastructure and winning over an initially hostile population, it involved day and night urban patrolling, nightly ambushes in rural areas, and forever seeking to kill or neutralize an enemy that by June 2003 was increasingly organized and determined. All of these actions, however, were executed while steadfastly avoiding injury to innocent civilians and minimizing damage to their property.

The division now faced the even greater challenges of providing security, stability, and humanitarian assistance to a country and a people devastated by decades of brutal repression and neglect. This may have seemed from some reporting like a pickup program cobbled together without much consideration, but the reality was that nearly a year prior the MEF opened discussions and worked solutions assuming the worst and disregarding the hope that some predicted for the situation once Saddam's regime was dead. As hope is never a course of action, we implemented our program first in Baghdad, then in a large swath of southern Iraq across an area the size of Missouri with nearly half the population of the country. As many of the division's units began the long trek home after turning the hard-won Phase III battlespace over to the Army's 3d and 4th IDs, those left behind opened an entirely new chapter of OIF.

SASO in Baghdad

The doctrinal definition for the business that lay ahead—SASO—made the mission sound unambiguous and concise. Neat doctrinal terms did not capture the realities on the ground, however, and “Blue Diamond” (divi-

sion's call sign) embarked on an effort that although planned for in general terms, few outside the MEF, in my view, foresaw the eventual length, size, scope, and complexity of the commitment. With the removal of the regime leadership an enormous power vacuum was created, a vacuum that the Coalition Provisional Authority was simply not ready to fill. Due to the ethnic, religious, tribal, and cultural fissures that are the reality of Iraqi society, it was quite likely that the unstable security situation would degenerate into bloody civil war. Even before combat operations ended, a multitude of factions were jockeying for their piece of the post-Saddam pie. There was no time to pause and catch a breath as looting, factional violence, and tribal vendettas had already begun. Mindful of its motto, "no better friend, no worse enemy," operations to restore a sense of normalcy to the lives of ordinary Iraqis and to help set the conditions for restoring public order and services commenced. Yet, the attention paid to these new tasks did not detract the force from continuing combat actions. There were still a great many former regime loyalists, foreign terrorists, and jihadists active. For those who sought a return to repression or worked to bring violence to the streets of Iraq, the men and women of Blue Diamond responded in no uncertain terms; however, the vast majority of the population would enjoy our protection and a freedom they are still unsure how to deal with.

What became immediately obvious was that we could never sustain half of a city that contained 6 million people. To coordinate the resumption of critical services the CMOC operated out of the centrally located Palestine Hotel. Initial CMOC meetings were specifically designed to take place with participation by the city's secular and religious leaders, all recruited as full partners in the effort to repair and rebuild. With this partnership, progress was made in restoring the civil bureaucracy and the establishment of a reasonably safe environment. Both of these factors would be critical if we hoped to lure nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to the city. In this regard we advertised an extended hand of cooperation and protection and that we looked forward to working with every NGO willing to help. Additionally, liaison was established early with the 3d ID to ensure the harmonization of civil-military operations on both sides of the Tigris River.

Coincident with the CMOC actions in early April, the RCTs shifted positions as the division received tasks to assume new missions. An internal relief in place was executed to free RCT-5 to move 50 miles north of Baghdad to Samarra and provide support for TF Tripoli's operations in Tikrit. Throughout this period all units hunted members of the former regime, and many by this time began to turn themselves in or risk identification, or worse, from local citizens. The vast majority of Iraqis welcomed us as liberators, but a wary eye and lightning quick life-and-death decisions were required of every member of the force regardless of rank, age, or occupational specialty. There was no front, no rear, no secured area, only reliance on a buddy to cover your "six," and the professional maturity to know when and how to act. This was Gen Charles C. Krulak's "three block war," and the Marines understood it and performed as if they were born to it.

With no help from without, the CMOC established functional areas for police, fire, electricity, water, and medical care. It appointed an interim police chief and opened a police academy. Electrical engineers were gathered up and set to work reestablishing the power grid, an effort central to restoring the most basic of human services. A wide range of philanthropic agencies like CARE (Cooperation for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc.), Red Crescent, and the World Food Program arrived and joined the effort. Psychological operations messages were produced and disseminated via broadcast and leaflet to assist in informing and protecting the innocent of eastern Baghdad. We encouraged civilian media coverage of all CMOC-NGO meetings and activities as it provided objective reporting regarding our level of determination and progress on the restoration of order. Radio broadcasts, in particular, assisted local leaders and security forces by appealing to the citizens of Baghdad that, for their own safety, they remain in their homes between the calls to evening and morning prayers. The CMOC's activities accelerated in the face of these and many more challenges—and successes. By the combined efforts of the CMOC, NGOs, local citizens, and American military units on both sides of the Tigris, the reestablishment of the city's services and repair of its infrastructure was given organization, efficiency, and hope.

By 15 April, the MEF/division was well into preparations for the turnover of eastern Baghdad to the 3d ID. The staffs and subordinate commanders worked out the details of turning the slowly recovering eastern half of the city over, even as Blue Diamond forces had commenced their move south. The relief was initiated on 18

April. First out was RCT-7, and after handing over its sectors of the city, it headed south to staging areas near Al Iskandariyah. Elements of RCT-5, to include 2/5 and 3/5, began their move from the vicinity of Samarra where it had supported TF Tripoli's actions for over a week. TF Tripoli came out last from Tikrit-Bayji, another 100 miles north of Samarra. On 21 April Blue Diamond completed its move to an interim assembly area and planted its colors in the vicinity of Ad Diwaniyah in an abandoned tank repair facility.

Down..Down
Baath regime police

هل فرض جبر من شرطة النظام السابق... يبيع عمره الديمقراطية الأمريكية؟
Is it u.s.a Democracy to impose the police
of the old regime

بنا نريد الامن والسلا... وليس علينا حساب كرامتنا
We seek peace and security, but not
account of our Dignity.



Part II: Tikrit, South to Babylon

by Brigadier General John F. Kelly

Marine Corps Gazette, March 2004.

This is Part II of a three-part series concerning Phase IV—security and stabilization operations—during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

The division's zone of occupation amounted to the entire southern half of the country (excluding 1st United Kingdom's zone in the southeast corner around Basra), with over 40 percent of Iraq's population. Borders with Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the southern suburbs of Baghdad bound it. A complicating factor in our repositioning to the south was the unexpected movement of thousands of Shia faithful participating in the Arba'een pilgrimage. Out of respect and necessity we delayed movement into some Phase IV positions until the pilgrimage was completed. The fact that thousands of Shia were, for the first time in decades, participating freely in one of their most revered traditions was a historic event. We took full advantage of this opportunity as well and, where we could, handed out fresh water and provided medical support to a disbelieving mass of worshipers. This is perhaps the first example of our opening initiatives to establish positive relations with a still very suspicious and even hostile population. In any event, by 24 April 2003 the division successfully staged those units preparing to return to Camp Pendelton and deployed the battalions slated to remain in their Phase IV zones taking responsibility for the following provinces: Al Muthanna (2d Battalion, 5th Marines (2/5)), Karbala (3/7), Babil (1/4), Al Qadisiyah (3/5), and An Najaf (1/7). Additionally, the provinces of Wasit and Dhi Qar were added when 2/25, 3/23, and 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion were attached from Task Force (TF) Tarawa—already in the process of retrograding to Kuwait and home. These battalions were in place in An Nasiriyah, Al Kut, and on the Iranian border, respectively.

The battlespace assumed by the division was unique. Labeled "south-central" by a still all but absent Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the population was overwhelmingly Shia. Recent combat operations, 12 years of United Nations sanctions, and willful neglect on the part of the regime all resulted in the south's infrastructure being in a condition of collapse. This created a major series of challenges for the newly designated military governors—read battalion commanders—in control of the seven provinces. Generally speaking there was no reliable water purification system, no intact power grid, and not even basic sanitation, sewage treatment, or trash collection. It was among the world's highest malaria threat areas. Years of filth piled high along roadsides made an outbreak of serious disease a major concern, with both coalition forces and local inhabitants at risk. Local police never protected or served the community but are a cog in the regime's machine of repression. They were overwhelmingly corrupt and on the take at every level. The real power at the local level—below the Ba'ath Party's interest—rested with tribal sheikhs, many themselves corrupt, often in league with the regime, and generally only interested in maintaining hold on power and petty perquisites. In addition to tribal affiliations the Shia community was made up of many different religious factions. Allegiance to one cleric or another defined the southern Shia almost as much as clan loyalties. Religious spats between rival clerical groups were often violent and were to have a significant impact on stability.

The battalions thrown into this complex, dangerous, and unhealthy environment responded with valiant efforts. They were, from commanders to squad leaders on patrol, in essence benevolent dictators with the wisdom of a Solomon required to cut through the maze of competing agendas and emotions that dominate Iraqi society. They were well-suited to the task as they were outfitted with the high ethical and moral foundations common to American military professionals, and set to work armed with their initiative, their imaginations, and the power of their wills to restore basic services and security throughout scattered cities, towns, and villages. They were no doubt hobbled in their efforts by the poor material condition of the infrastructure and the lack of competent technicians to operate it. They were also initially handicapped financially as the CPA, and the dollars for recovery they would eventually provide, were themselves in the organization phase and not yet able to

take up the task. The commanders leaned into the mission undeterred, however, and not only unshackled the people but set their provinces on a true course for eventual recovery.

The immediate task at hand was to evaluate each province and design a coordinated strategy tailored to the needs of each. This strategy included an assessment of infrastructure, threats to good order, and identification of local authorities who could help bring order out of the chaos. Provinces were different and each had its own challenges. To help focus the efforts in each province and provide a more effective battalion to division connection, understudy officers were assigned by Blue Diamond and immersed themselves in local issues with the aim of becoming objective experts. They were soon invaluable in keeping commanders and staffs informed of intelligence trends, local gossip, clerical proclamations (fatwahs), and events on the street. They met frequently among themselves trading information and experiences, and ensured that everyone concerned benefited from lessons learned across the zone.

The approach was to decentralize with local commanders piloting the endeavor as those closest to the “rocks and shoals” in each region. The overall goal was to quickly bring the maximum benefit to the greatest number of people, avoiding at almost any cost the accidental death or injury of an innocent civilian, farm animal, or damage to crops. By starting their work in the largest population centers then moving outward into the countryside, the program enjoyed almost immediate success; although even this logical approach encountered problems due in large measure to the ages old tension between city dwellers and rural communities. It seemed that every action taken to benefit one village, group, or tribe would serve to alienate another. The battalions walked a tightrope until they understood to link initiatives and demonstrate advantages for all. As they grew more skilled in Iraqi diplomacy, workable compromises emerged and improvements benefited every group. Electrical power, for instance, in the city also translated into pumps irrigating crops in rural areas. Functioning sanitation for urban dwellers meant raw human waste was no longer trucked out into the country and dumped indiscriminately on fields, alongside roads, or into rural water sources. As time passed, this effort built trust with the local citizens across the republic.

Each province, city, and even village had its own unique personality, but two—Karbala and Najaf—were particularly difficult to manage. These two holiest cities in the Shia tradition have rather direct ties to Iran—the only entirely Shia nation in Islam. The sensitivities of the religious community based in these holy cities were of tremendous concern and unbelievably complicated. Predictions were dire. The “experts” and “Arabists” advised that as unbelievers, largely Christian and (worst of all) Americans, these cities would be tinderboxes of discontent and resistance. Karbala, with a population of nearly 550,000, was home to the shrine of Imam Abi Abdillah Al-Husain, the martyred grandson of Mohammed and a founder of the Shia sect of Islam. Najaf, slightly larger than Karbala, was the site of the tomb of Hussein, son-in-law of the prophet. Both cities are filled with highly sensitive religious sites, mosques, and revered tombs. As the spiritual centers of Shiite Islam they also contain the offices of many of the sect’s most important and influential ayatollahs—all with some relationship to Iran. As it turned out, however, these were success stories as were the other five provinces—just more complicated.

All of us learned early that Islam is very much a part of every aspect of Iraqi life—including civil government—unlike anything we experience as Americans. There is little separation between church and civil authority as we understand it or would ever allow. It is completely intertwined, seemingly inseparable and, as we learned, not necessarily what the population desires. As with every city, however, the approach taken was one that assumed we already had the “hearts and minds” of the people, even if they did not necessarily know it yet. We worked to conquer whatever reservations and animosities some might have toward us with respect for their culture, opinions, and religion. By treating every member of the society with fairness and dignity we were confident we would, over time, gain the trust and cooperation of even the most unconvinced. Our sense was that if the power of American openness, decency, and ideals could not win, no amount of military power could. This was, however, tougher than we thought. It was, and remained, a dangerous place as former regime loyalists, radical religious fanatics, and violent criminals were present in relative force. Additionally, the local population held us in great suspicion, and even animosity, as they blamed America for what they perceived to be our lack of action after Operation DESERT STORM. They are convinced that the United States broke its promis-

es of support if they would only rise up and attempt the overthrow of Saddam. They made the attempt and for their trouble reportedly suffered many hundreds of thousands dead and tortured when his butchers were finished. This fact, they will tell you, is borne out by the many mass gravesites throughout the region.

Considering these factors, and many more, the force was warned to be ever on their guard as scattered throughout the population were a small number of violent men seeking to discredit our civil-military initiatives, draw us into responses that would cause us to inadvertently injure and kill the greatest number of innocent civilians possible and, finally, send as many of us home in body bags as they could. Blue Diamond was also introduced to a new watchword—"do no harm"—and instructed to add this to their philosophy of dealing with the Iraqi population, the overwhelming numbers of whom were simply trying to survive.

Police, Power, and Government

Assessments in every province identified that the three most pressing needs were for police, electric power and fuel deliveries, and local governmental structures. The restoration of police services was a challenge made more difficult by the suspicion with which the population held every member of every department in the country. Winning the public's trust and confidence here would be a daunting task. Formerly, the police were underpaid with full expectation that these officers would make up for their low income by extortion and bribery. In spite of the urgent requirement to put police on the streets right away, it was more important to send a signal to the officers themselves that their role had changed. Improper conduct by police officers and officials would not be tolerated in the new force. In almost every case, the battalion commanders fired the entire force and then rehired those they were personally convinced were salvageable. Some commanders invited trusted local officials and private citizens to participate in this process. Commanders established their own police academies with programs of instruction that included ethics training, basic police techniques, weapons use, and community relations. "You can't shake down the locals anymore," was lesson one. Joint patrols operated on the streets in this opening stage, building trust and confidence in departments that historically had not deserved either.

After initial training programs came longer term initiatives including expanded training opportunities, internal affairs functions, management, expanded ethics sessions, and instruction in law. In As Samawah, for instance, a 10-day course was established by 2/5 that graduated over 700 officers. In many of the provinces, commanders requested and received the services of Reserve Marines who were police officers in their civilian lives. Marine and Army military policemen were instrumental throughout, adding their talents and expertise to the daily functioning of the departments. This once hated institution evolved into relevant law enforcement and service departments under the careful instruction and supervision of noncommissioned officers and junior officers—backed by Marine quick reaction forces. By July 2003 these initiatives had matured to the point that joint patrols were all but eliminated. The streets were placed almost entirely into the hands of Iraqi policemen with departments working in close concert with the battalions for more complex or dangerous operations. This by no means meant the police were unsupervised, as they were monitored continuously by our commanders and their attached Army military police and backed by Marine reaction forces, but it did mean that the process of putting an Iraqi face on security was well underway.

Energy Starved in Iraq

Electrical power and fuel, or more accurately sufficient and reliable quantities, were the bane of our existence during the entire security and stabilization operations period. This was a major issue and the test of our effectiveness as all sources of energy, including diesel, benzene (gas), and propane, were essential. Elements of energy included the facility infrastructure, sources of fuel, and distribution system. Each element was burdened with corruption, inefficiency, and shortages. The infrastructure was decrepit with little maintenance conducted since the uprisings and repression after the Gulf War. For the battalions that inherited this system, and were supposed to restore it to working order, it was unbelievable that a country so rich in these products had little available for local use. Commanders assaulted all three problems at once, seeking out engineers and workers too afraid to come to work and ensuring their protection. Most distribution pipelines, for example, were out of service. Those in service had much of their fuel stolen by thieves who for years made a living tapping into the lines and selling their pickings on the black market outside Iraq. This was the case with natural gas lines as well. There was also a rise in sabotage as the former regime criminals worked to undermine and discredit us.

Until pipelines were repaired and protected, precious fuel had to be trucked long distances from the refineries around Basra. This was not a very practical solution as power facilities required more than 100,000 gallons of fuel daily, and there were many to feed.

A similar situation existed with the electrical infrastructure. One of the major problems was looters who made a living of tearing down high-tension lines and stripping them for the copper. As with pipelines, saboteurs were also active. In Karbala 3/7 organized the repair of a series of downed 200-foot-high pylons and worked out an equitable means to ration electricity between industrial and residential users. An Nasiriyah and 2/25 faced a unique power dilemma as a huge circuit involving a number of interconnected grids required repair. With time, money, perseverance, and installation of a huge transformer, the electric grid between Baghdad-Hillah-Nasiriyah was completed and power restored as far south as Basra and the Kuwaiti border.

The answer was security, but it was impossible to patrol many thousands of miles of pipeline and power systems. Over the road movement was also unreliable as convoys were subject to frequent hijackings and, even at that, could only be a stopgap considering the amount of fuel required. There was no single answer to the problem. In Najaf 1/7 organized TF Rio to provide security to the lines within its zone. Another was to involve the I Marine Expeditionary Force's aviation element with all pilots directed to fly the lines and report. This was a secondary mission on every flight, and we tied reaction forces to these reports. The arrival of the aircraft alone, however, was often enough to deter the activity and set the thieves scurrying into the desert. The problem certainly never went away, but we were well along in getting out in front of it when we redeployed home at mission's end.

Reinventing Local Government

The difficulty of running half a country can be summed up by a lack of a dependable public service bureaucracy. With over 10 million inhabitants, and all of the associated functions of providing utilities, schools, sanitation, medical care and nutrition, this level of organization was critical—and nonexistent. Recovery would not be as easy as simply rehiring the Iraqis who had previously held these posts. The regime's method for civil service had been irrationally centralized and inefficient. Loyalty to the party was, of course, infinitely more important than competence as this was a key component in how the regime penetrated to the lowest level of Iraqi life, entered the home, and exercised control. The system was almost entirely corrupt and nepotistic in the worse way, without concern or interest in the well-being of constituents. Town councils or city managers had no concept of how to do anything that required a decision. As in the past it was safer to execute instructions issued directly from Baghdad. The absence of the regime's corrupt henchmen, however, left the now vetted local leadership without even basic instructions. Again, battalion commanders, assisted in this case by the government support teams organized out of necessity that someday will be taken over by CPA, stepped into the role.

The tactics were the same throughout the Marines' area of responsibility. Commanders at all levels met with local government officials, technocrats, and sheikhs, and vetted them in terms of how connected to the former regime they may have been. Pledges of commitment to granting political power to the people in a newly organized civil structure came quickly. In Al Hillah, for example, 1/4 held initial meetings and convinced officials and government workers to create a city council to provide a check and balance on the new government's actions. Meetings were also held with religious and tribal leaders to identify independent delegates for the council. The goal was to establish a council that was not dominated by a single constituency and included not only the majority Shia, but women as well.

Similarly in Karbala, the city council, led by a serving official, was engaged by representatives of 3/7 to start the process of restoring city services and critical infrastructure. Trouble developed, however, when hundreds of citizens demonstrated over the retention of the incumbent, a man they accused as a high-ranking and corrupt Ba'ath Party goon. The commander met with the demonstrators and reached a solution. In mid-May, elections for a new interim city council were held, with all positions temporary and performance-based until the establishment of a more permanent structure once the CPA decided on future political structures. The end result, once approved by the commander, was, for the first time in any Iraqi's memory, a council with real leadership ability and the interests of the community at heart. From this initiative a more pragmatic and responsi-

ble group of public servants emerged and were almost immediately making real and measurable progress.

In As Samawah 2/5 took advantage of a unique set of circumstances that made the environment more conducive to honest government. Under the firm direction of the commander, the city's government made a miraculous turnaround in its ethical service orientation to the populace. With the effort led by the battalion's legal officer, the first structure rebuilt was the local criminal and civil court system. The effort gained credibility by partnership with the 12 most prominent tribal leaders. In May the new judiciary was stood up with four honest and popularly screened judges sworn in. City payroll procedures were next with checks and balances in place to minimize extortion, corruption, and skimming by senior officials. The city council, once a tool of the regime, was reelected in a way that would make Americans proud. A viable, responsive, and all-inclusive council went to work for the first time in anyone's memory. As a check to the power of the sheikhs, technocrats were included, as were a total of nine political and religious parties.

An Najaf—ever the thorn—serves as a final example. Citizen groups appealed to 1/7 and expressed a complete lack of confidence in any of the sitting judges, all of whom were charged as corrupt and closely associated with the terrible repression the regime focused on this city in the past. The commander investigated and, when convinced, removed all but a very few who could convince him of their honesty. At the same time the mayor, also identified as corrupt and murderous, stood as an impediment to honest government. The mayor's removal became the first real test case of the Iraqi judicial system in south central—a system reformed by Americans who were not experts but understood what a legal justice system was supposed to be from at least high school civics classes, if from nowhere else. The mayor, Abu Haydar Abdul Mun'im, was a former army colonel set in office by American forces a month before. The process of removing him began almost immediately after 1/7's assumption of the zone. The mayor was wildly unpopular before the appointment, and his popularity declined even more as he conducted himself in a way reminiscent of the previous regime hacks. Less than 3 months after his appointment, an Iraqi investigative judge, supported and shown the way by the battalion staff, ordered his arrest on corruption and murder charges. Once the warrant was issued, Marines strode into the mayor's compound, surrounded by his Praetorian Guard of special police and bodyguards, and took him into custody. Delivered to the newly reformed national court system in Baghdad, he was scheduled to be the first high-profile prosecution. Immediately after his arrest the city's governing council chose an interim mayor, approved by the commander, who was eager to institute reforms.

In virtually every province, city, and village it was the same. Corrupt governing councils and courts, the former regime's local means of control and repression, were replaced by the most honorable men and women that commanders could locate and convince to serve. These emerging leaders assumed the roles of popular representatives, something denied Iraqis for longer than some of the new appointees had been alive. Remember, there had not been a single honest and fair election in Iraq since long before even Saddam. The citizens also looked to the commanders, and the civil affairs soldiers attached from our Army to every battalion headquarters, for the lessons on how to govern democratically. Just as importantly, the Iraqis gazed at us in American and British uniforms for their first glimpse of what selfless dedication and ethical public service were all about.



Part III: Tikrit, South to Babylon

by Brigadier General John F. Kelly

Marine Corps Gazette, April 2004.

This is the third of a three-part series on security and stabilization operations (SASO) during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

A key responsibility inherited after the collapse of the regime was the territorial sovereignty of Iraq. Air and ground patrols were periodically dispatched to the border with Saudi Arabia where we found crossing points well controlled by their officials. The Iranian border was a more significant issue. Unlike the border with Saudi Arabia that was hundreds of miles from Iraqi centers of population with almost no trade, religious, or family links, the Iranian border north of Al Kut had all of these and more. Many argued that Iran had a vested interest in a weak and destabilized Iraq. Others made the point that Tehran would attempt to exert anti-American pressure on the Shia in Iraq through the clerics, particularly those in Karbala and Najaf. The most immediate issue on the border, however, was the violent, abusive, and reportedly criminal behavior of the Iranian border guards. These guards had taken to extorting and abusing the hordes of religious pilgrims now free to travel into Iraq exercising religious freedom as a result of Saddam's removal. For the first time since Saddam established his murderous regime, the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala were open to all Shia. Pilgrims poured in from Iran, primarily in family units, to worship at religious sites and even bury long dead loved ones in the earth adjacent to the sacred mosques. Additionally, refugees desired entry, as did Iranians seeking to visit family—a privilege denied them since before the Iran-Iraq War. Screening every individual who desired entry in an effort to “keep the terrorists out” proved impossible without a system of passports, visas, and or databases with which to work. The good will generated by allowing the free movement of Shia made closing the border ill-advised, and we resisted suggestions to do so.

The border region was remote, sparsely populated, and very difficult terrain. Again, to put an Iraqi face out front, the reestablishment of an Iraqi border guard force in the area by 3d Battalion, 23d Marines (3/23) was a major step forward. Like the police and government officials, these officers were first vetted, then trained, and finally supervised. As there were insufficient Marine assets initially to maintain a permanent presence on the border, we covered the requirement with regular aerial reconnaissance flights and intermittent short-term missions by 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (4th LAR). By July sufficient forces were made available due to the increasingly cooperative environment in Al Kut to the south, allowing 3/23 to permanently assign an infantry company to the border. The task fell to Company I, 3/23, with Marines and corpsmen from Arkansas, Utah, and Pennsylvania. Setting up living spaces in one of the many abandoned Iraqi concrete forts that line the border, the company—true to form—began to work the few villages in the region, mark the numerous minefields left unrecorded from the Iran-Iraq War, and generally provide a presence and “stiffener” for the Iraqi border officials with whom they worked and supervised daily.

Cross border activity increased exponentially during the summer. Only documented individuals were allowed passage with no vehicles allowed either way. The operation remained generally organized and benign with the presence force from 3/23 overseeing the Iraqi operation of the crossing, patrolling the few roads running parallel to the border, and monitoring the many smuggler routes through the hills and along the washes of the rough desert terrain. There were sporadic occasions of abuse by the Iranian guards when in early August a dangerous incident of violence occurred as Iranian soldiers began assaulting travelers waiting in the buffer zone. A number were injured by beatings with truncheons. Without reason the Iranians began to deliver a large volume of AK-47 fire in the direction of the crowd, just above their heads, and into Iraq. A squad of Marines maintained at the crossing deployed just outside the buffer standing ready to protect the unarmed civilians, but with this action the cowardly Iranian guards fled back to Iran and safety. The squad leader on the scene, truly a “strategic corporal,” closed the crossing until the situation cooled and later opened the border for traffic. The company continued working the border in true *beau geste* fashion and circumstances until relieved by the Ukrainian brigade in September.

The Northern Babil Province Heats Up

Although the entire zone was dangerous—with criminals and unrepentant Saddam loyalists active throughout—our efforts with the local population assisted us in all but eliminating violence by midsummer. I should add that having the people on your side means more than anything in this environment, but it also helps when it is widely known that no one had yet beat the Marines in the “10-second firefight.” There was, however, a far northern slice of our zone where we had not yet spent much effort that grew increasingly active with hit and run violence. During May, as the Army continued its buildup at the end of the conventional stage of the conflict, Forward Logistics Base Dogwood was established at a former military base in northern Babil Province astride the Euphrates River 12 miles southwest of Baghdad. This area of Iraq was a faultline between the predominately Shia south and Sunni north. Nearly all roads to Baghdad from the south passed through this zone. The main supply route—Highway 1 from Kuwait—and alternate supply routes (ASRs)—Highways 8 from Al Hillah and 9 from the west and Karbala—all converged here. Most notably, however, was ASR “Sue,” a narrow two-lane road that meandered through the lowland villages and agricultural fields for 22 miles. ASR Sue was a connector route and an important logistical lifeline for soldiers in Baghdad. It was used by up to 90 convoys a day.

By early June Blue Diamond-Main, now collocated with I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) in the ancient ruins complex of Babylon near Al Hillah, received frequent reports of convoy ambushes along ASR Sue, although the number of actual attacks was difficult to determine. There was no system in place to verify reports as they came through any of a number of command channels, seldom timely, often turning incomplete and inaccurate initial reports, including double reporting, into “fact.” For instance, in the first 2 weeks of June there were 51 reported attacks along this route, although the standard by which an attack was measured ranged from a single driver thinking he had been shot at to the tragic wounding or death of a soldier and vehicles destroyed by combined automatic weapons and rocket propelled grenade (RPG) fire. Thankfully there were few of these. Reports at the time indicated there had been, on average, three attacks per day by small arms—two per day involving RPGs. During this period another weapon made an occasional appearance—the improvised explosive device (IED)—a weapon that is today the weapon of choice for the guerillas. In any event, regardless of the confusion, we owned the terrain and, in response to the local commander’s immediate concerns. Blue Diamond organized and deployed Task Force (TF) Scorpion named for the base unit’s call sign.

TF Scorpion’s mission and task organization evolved over time as the tactical situation changed and the enemy reacted to our increasingly successful initiatives. Initially the threat was against defenseless logistics convoys that some described as “manatees.” Convoy personnel on interview typically revealed they had not been briefed that the nature of the threat changed significantly once they put Kuwait in their rearview mirrors. Even convoys coming out of Dogwood or down from Baghdad were not always taking the precautions prudent while operating in such a threat. This made the vehicles easy targets for a host of Iraqi predators. In the beginning the ambush action was no more than one or two assailants standing next to the road in plain sight during the day, emptying an AK-47 magazine at the approaching vehicles, and walking away. Occasionally an RPG might be fired. The convoy’s immediate action was to drive through the “kill zone.” It was difficult to determine if fire was ever returned or if there was any effort on the part of convoy personnel to maneuver against the renegades. This is not a criticism, but we had to understand the facts to design a campaign.

On 13 June, TF Scorpion, organized around the 4th LAR, moved into its battlespace carved out of 1/4’s zone and thereafter referred to as the “Northern Babil.” It was reinforced with a number of smaller units and capabilities. The first order of business was the obvious requirement to secure ASR Sue from the paid Iraqi thugs who preyed upon the convoys unmolested. This was accomplished in short order by saturating the immediate vicinity of the roadway with aggressive Marine patrols. Instead of manatees the terrorists encountered hunters. Every would-be ambusher soon knew the capability of the light armored vehicle (LAV). Like the Cobras, the “light horsemen” of the LAR community were respected—and feared—their reputations earned and well-deserved. The second task was to work with senior Army leaders in Dogwood and Baghdad to encourage them to improve the awareness, and encourage defensive reaction by convoy personnel when departing secure logistics bases.

TF Scorpion’s initial “do something right away” action was to intersperse LAVs in among the convoy’s vehicles in the hopes that ambushers might engage. The terrorists were ruthless but not particularly suicidal, and this

tactic failed to lure many into our kill zone. Another technique in this “cat and mouse” game was to run small “Trojan horse” convoys through the area. The “bait” vehicles themselves had been hardened with a continuous wall of meals, ready-to-eat boxes filled with sand lining the outer edges of the vehicle beds to give the appearance of a defenseless logistic vehicle. The vehicles were not defenseless, however, because in addition to the driver and assistant driver in the cab—who were riflemen as well as logistics professionals—there were Marines hidden within the wall of boxes “chomping at the bit” to return fire and deploy. Terrorists fighters must have been amazed as convoys of HMMWVs or medium tactical vehicle replacements now were just as likely to stop on contact, return fire, and deploy riflemen, as rush past to safety. After only a few days of operations the enemy adjusted tactics. They were no longer willing to stand next to the road and shoot at American vehicles regardless of how slow they traveled and helpless they appeared. The ambushers adjusted by moving farther and farther back from the road in order to survive, resulting in their fire growing increasingly ineffective. By mid-June the number of attacks had fallen off to a fraction of what they had been. By early July there were no direct fire attacks at all.

As effective as the combat tactics were, working the convoy routes in hopes of killing a few not so dedicated trigger-pullers was treating the “symptom” and not the “disease” of suspicion and hostility toward the coalition in this contested region. There were those outside the MEF who encouraged us to go more “kinetic” and consider the use of AC-130s, close air support, and artillery against suspected hostile sites. We took a different approach. We needed to do here what had worked so well for us throughout the rest of the zone—to win the trust of the locals whom we were here to help and who were here to stay. The Scorpion team implemented a parallel program of civil affairs activities in the population centers with explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) serving as a particularly effective tool in helping penetrate the civilian communities, many of which lived in terror of anticoalition forces. The use of U.S. fire support assets had been heavy here, as units fought through the area in April on the way to Baghdad. There was a massive amount of unmarked unexploded ordnance (UXO) spread across the fields and villages. A tremendously effective psychological operations and information campaign, developed by the Army soldiers attached to the division from the 432d Civil Affairs Battalion (from Green Bay, WI), first warned local citizens of the dangers of UXO and provided posters and handbills to help identify the objects. The second aspect of the campaign was to encourage the Iraqi citizens to contact the newly arrived Marines for removal of dangerous materials from their fields, homes, schools, and neighborhoods. The EOD Marines began a nonstop campaign that ultimately, over a period of many weeks, resulted in the removal of 250,000 pounds of UXO, but at the cost of several dead and wounded. This common interest also began a process of extending TF Scorpion’s influence and trust into the population. The real intelligence sources would be found among the people—a reality, again, we had learned previously. Soon the people were overtly and covertly stepping forward with tips and warnings to the Marines and soldiers with whom they had developed a fragile relationship of trust.

By early July the enemy once again changed tactics. They gave up on the ineffective—and highly dangerous to themselves—direct fire ambush, altering their tactics to the almost exclusive use of IEDs. These were most often mortar or artillery shell “daisy chained” together and command detonated. Soon the TF found its stride here as well, and although IED attacks rose to a high average of July, they began to fall in number almost immediately to near zero by the end of the month. In dealing with the evolving threat it was clear the LAR-centric TF had the mobile patrols covered but was in need of “grunts” to do the dirty work off-road and in the towns. The need for infantrymen to hunt down and kill this elusive enemy working in the shadows along the roadsides at night or cord-on target sites for search or ambush was obvious; however, just as obvious was the need to get “boots on the ground” in amongst the citizenry of the Northern Babil and in those places where we were warned by friends, and threatened by our few enemies, not to tread. We went there first.

In late June two rifle companies—Company I, 3/7, traveling up from Karbala, and Company E, 2/5, As Samawah—were attached. In the first case the company commander selected a position adjacent to Al Mahmudiyah and directly astride a very active IED “mixing bowl.” The company had not yet even unrolled their sleeping mats when they were out prowling the night on initial patrols. In exactly the same way, Company G selected a similarly dangerous position near the city of Al Yusufiyah, one that would give it access to both the population and active IED zones. Many of these tough young men were in ambush sites and first night seeking early contact and were not disappointed. The impact of the infantry’s arrival, along with the combined efforts of the TF

of nearly 1,000 personnel from 3 Services, clearly presented the enemy with more dilemmas than he could handle. The anticoalition forces were forced to alter their tactics a third time. We now saw the introduction of sporadic mortar attacks from hastily laid ground or vehicleborne tubes. These attacks were obviously conducted by men who were not only unskilled with the weapons but also very interested in not directly confronting the infantry who were everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Great tactical headwork by junior leaders was quick to figure the enemy's procedures, predict his routines, and set ambushes and sniper teams in those places that presented a mortar threat—and they ceased. We once again resisted the suggestion to reply to these attacks with heavy firepower, a response that we felt would likely wound or kill innocent Iraqis. Even if innocents were not hit—and more importantly from a hearts and minds perspective—we felt it would severely erode our message that innocent Iraqi lives were as precious to us as were our own. We calculated that the use of bombs and artillery against a fleeing enemy long gone before the first ordnance struck made no tactical sense, was in fact counterproductive, and would send the message that we held the lives of Iraqis in low regard. Some argued it would show Iraqis who was boss, or our resolve and power. We elected to rely on a high degree of field craft and the tactical expertise and confidence of our company grade infantry leaders.

The final stage of operations for TF Scorpion, before their relief by elements of the 82d Airborne Division, was a spoiling attack against a large number of unrepentant former regime supporters just prior to their own offensive. Our counteractions were made possible by the wealth of actionable intelligence the small units were gleaned from the many sheikhs, clerics, police, and private citizens throughout the zone but particularly in Babil. Long before being alerted by Commander, Joint Task Force 7 in Baghdad of the pending offensive, the G-2 (intelligence) sections at MEF and Blue Diamond, in collaboration, detected an unmistakable increase in indications and warnings focused on a 4-day period corresponding to the 14 July anniversary of the founding of the Ba'ath Party in Iraq. The intelligence unquestionably pointed toward an aggressive campaign of IED and other terrorist-type attacks. Our response was a simultaneous counteroffensive against a number of these suspected individuals designed and executed to disrupt the expected attack. Building up a large number of detailed target folders we held off striking individuals until 12 July in order to maximize the disruption of this plan and minimize the period of time they had available to recover. So successful was this initiative that the division continued this tactic in an effort to round up senior regime officials, fedayeen, and terrorists until we departed the zone. By continuing the attack and taking the fight to the enemy, we greatly reduced hostile influence against us in Northern Babil. Each raid led to the next and were most often conducted by the infantry companies or attached force reconnaissance assets from the Reserves. These raids, or "cordons and knocks" as we first termed them, were typically executed at night and were backed by invaluable Cobra and Huey support from the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing. These actions were highly successful in capturing large arms and ordnance caches, IED production facilities and their technicians, Ba'ath Party stalwarts responsible for hiring local trigger-pullers, and even occasional cells working against our soldiers to the north in Baghdad.

The Division Heads Home

By early summer, forces from as many as 24 nations began to descend on Babylon to begin the process of turning southern Iraq over to the Polish-led multinational division (MND). Among the first to arrive was an advance party from the Italian Defense Ministry arriving in the Dhi Qar Province to prepare the way for the arrival of the Garibaldi brigade and the relief of 2/25. The Garibaldi brigade's main body arrived on 26 June and included Carabinieri as well as Romanian soldiers. On 9 July the relief progressed with the Italians establishing command and control nodes at Qalat Sukkar and Ash Shattrah, scenes of heavy fighting in March along Highway 7 south of Al Kut. The Dhi Qar Province was turned over on 20 July.

Six more reliefs were accomplished in rapid succession. The pattern was similar for each of them. Planners and liaison officers were exchanged followed by advance parties arriving shortly thereafter. Finally, the main body of replacement troops would arrive. I do not think it is an understatement to say that the multinational soldiers were shocked at the unexpected level of danger that was the reality in the zones they were assuming. Most were also visibly impressed—even intimidated—by the air of quiet confidence and obvious indifference to hazard demonstrated by the members of Blue Diamond as they commenced their "left seat-right seat" patrols. It was the 130-degree heat they were already enduring, the threat of instant violence all around them taken for granted by

those they were replacing, and the Spartan conditions these Marines considered “living large,” that made the allies understand they were replacing expeditionary warriors of the first order.

End of Operations

The MEF commander handed the formal responsibility for the zone to the MND commander in a Babylon ceremony conducted on 3 September 2003, although 1/7 was delayed by the unwillingness on the part of the Spanish brigade to assume responsibility for Najaf until a number of U.S. Central Command issues were sorted out delaying the transfer until early October. We Marines, with our attached Army professionals, had certainly conducted operations differently in the south than SASO had been executed in the north. What had worked for us may not have worked in Baghdad, Kirkuk, or Mosul, but the results for us were startling.

Some have said we have no doctrine for what we did in Phase IV, but I disagree. I know it is not technically doctrine, but I suggest our *Small Wars Manual* for a starter, not to mention our documented successes learned for us in Vietnam by some very brave men. There is also a wealth of knowledge available for those who read in the lessons of our southern colonies during the Revolution, Napoleon’s peninsula campaign, Forrest’s Tennessee-Mississippi-Alabama campaign, Lawrence’s Arab revolt, Tito’s Yugoslavia, the French in Indochina and Algeria, and the British in Malaysia and Northern Ireland. Luckily we had men who were very familiar with these campaigns and many, many more. In reality, however, we do have a doctrine and a warfighting philosophy that opens the mind to problem-solving and avoids the set piece. The debate about maneuver warfare is thankfully over. I would be lying to you, and kidding myself, if I said everyone was an avid practitioner, and I do not know if the schools have it right even now. I do know it very much depends on the person, his or her traits, and life’s experiences. What we do have, I can assure you, are sufficient leaders at every level who run through the loop very fast—and act without hesitation. These are individuals who will employ a 2,000 pound joint direct attack munition or pass out water to anticoalition protesters, situation depending. I think for much of this we can thank Cols John Boyd, USAF(Ret) and Mike Wyly, USMC(Ret), and certainly my friend, William Lind, from Ohio, all men I have known and worked with in the past.

Basic to everything we did was a sense that we were freeing a people and not conquering a nation. We had flown from March Air Force Reserve Base in southern California or floated from the 32d Street pier in San Diego with the attitude that the Iraqi people were victims of a terrible disaster and that we were going to help. This was as important a message as the search for weapons of mass destruction ever was to those of us who deployed. We had already gained the “hearts and minds” of the Iraqis during combat operations, of that we were sure. The wild demonstrations of Iraqi joy delivered that message clearly. We also knew that these hearts and minds were ours to lose and that possession was a fragile thing. We treated the people with dignity and respect, and it was returned. We also won every firefight in Phase IV and, from 28 April 2003 until our departure in October, lost no Marines from hostile fire. During this time when those foolish enough decided to contest our presence, we responded with civic action programs, medical treatment, and lastly, a very deliberate and discriminating application of deadly force. Our first instinct had been to do no harm to the innocent, and we left a trail of good will behind. We had made friends one Iraqi at a time. Our belief is that they, over time, appreciated the sacrifices made on their behalf. As one Iraqi told someone, his change of heart came one day on departing his mosque in Al Kut after Friday prayers. For weeks his cleric had ranted about the Americans and how we had only come to steal their oil—that we were a godless people who brought pornography, drugs, and alcohol to their society, and would do nothing good for Iraq. The man then would exit the mosque into the furnace that is the afternoon heat during Iraq’s summer and see Marines patrolling at the risk of their lives, Army military policemen apprehending violent criminals, and SeaBees rehabilitating schools and hospitals, repairing bridges, and all of the other examples of our actions on the ground. Over time the clerics had no choice but to adjust their rhetoric as seeing was believing.

We are now redeploying our forces and people are asking if we will do the same thing in 2004 as we did in 2003. The answer, of course, is every situation is different. We are already working our way through the history books and reports of units now in the zone we will assume. Whatever is ultimately decided, I believe we will still seek to first and foremost do no harm to those who mean us none.





What Do You Do for an Encore?

by Colonel Christopher C. Conlin

Marine Corps Gazette, September 2004.

'[S]mall wars are operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our nation. . . Small Wars represent the normal and frequent operations of the Marine Corps.'

—Small Wars Manual 1940

Evening was falling on 9 April 2003. "First Team," 1st Battalion, 7th Marines (1/7) was consolidating in our just won section of downtown Baghdad. We had inherited over 28 square kilometers of dense urban terrain that included the "Manhattan" equivalent of the city, home to the remaining Embassies and national figures like Terik Aziz. It had been a heady victory making this final push. In the space of a few hours we had been welcomed by a disorienting mix of cheering crowds, a frenzied press, and a full-blown ambush on the grounds of the Baghdad University. Surreal!

But now we were hit by a far more perplexing challenge. Having thoroughly defeated the "evil empire" of Saddam, we had effectively stripped away all vestiges of his Orwellian dictatorship, leaving only . . . us. What to do for an encore? We were now the single center of authority. In a blinding flash, we had become the local government, the utilities, the banks, the information bureau, the health care provider, the police, the court system, even the dogcatchers. We were it. Just over 1,000 Marines, soldiers, and sailors comprising our battalion task force became responsible for an area and population the size of Manhattan Island.

Transition Mission

The following article will outline how 1/7 addressed the daunting issue of what are often called "transition operations" in Baghdad. Of course, no one operates in isolation, and this article should hopefully address the great support we received from our higher and adjacent commands. But it will also identify some thoughts on how we can better affect these operations when presented with similar circumstances. Additionally, this will be the first of a series of articles that also address the challenge of what are being called "stability operations" as we further refined our tactics in the southern city of Najaf. These articles will provide a little history, a bit of perspective, some strong opinions, and some suggestions on what to do if you find yourself similarly challenged.

The most significant aspect of the transition I saw in Baghdad was the immediacy of our succession to the sole responsible authority in the city. Within minutes of our seizure of the capital one of my lieutenants was presented with the rapidly expiring body of an Iraqi who had been pried from a vehicle accident seconds before. He was not a war casualty but a simple victim of a “routine” incident. The fact that the locals brought him to us as he was in his final death spasms was their unequivocal realization that the normal procedure—going to the hospital or calling the police—was gone. This episode was duplicated throughout our zone with geometrically increasing frequency. Frantic locals ran up to tell us phones were out and that the water was off. Doctors reported hospitals being looted. Locals were desperate to know where they should dump the trash, could they use cell phones, or was it okay to drive to their father’s house in Mosul. They wanted us to arrest a strange man with a gun lurking in their neighborhood. We were approached by alleged sheiks who demanded to see “his Excellency the General” about their tribe’s loyalty to Mr. Bush. On and on the requests came—all being diligently received and somehow answered by our young squad leaders and platoon leaders.

We, too, were in transition. Having overwhelmed organized resistance, we were hot on the trail of Saddam’s more shadowy secret police organization (SSO) and fedayeen. As if a great light had been turned on, the locals were quickly letting us know the identities of these terror troops, and we found them fairly easy hunting. Stripped of their official protection—and well-known as a result of their horrific bullying—our aggressive small unit leaders were able to hit them in their homes and offices in ever quickening succession. We created hunter-killer teams on the fly, sending our very talented human exploitation teams (HETs), psychological operations (PsyOps), and civil affairs group (CAG) teams down to the platoon level in some cases to rapidly turn around actionable intelligence from one target to the next. Companies worked huge urban sectors, usually rotating platoons to achieve a 24/7 battle rhythm. The effect was dramatic. And as the locals saw our progress they joined even more enthusiastically into the feeding frenzy.

At the same time the city was changing under our feet. Prior to our attack we had reports of scattered looting of government buildings and the disappearance of the local police and “Gestapo”-type secret police. Immediately following the attack we saw some looting, but it was limited to the homes of the ousted (and absent) government officials, mostly being done by rejoicing neighbors. But this quickly changed to a wholesale “grab and go” of whatever was of value. And the grabbers were multiplying and getting more and more aggressive, using weapons where needed to burgle what they could not simply walk away with. Literally, it was a chapter out of H.G. Wells as the Morlocks were feasting on the proverbial Eloi.

On top of this was the total lack of operating city infrastructure. The electricity, water, sewage, fuel stations, police, fire department, public hospitals, and all those things that make a city function were off, closed, or absent. Some blamed Saddam; others said the United States had bombed the critical nodes during our attack. Regardless, every facet of this modern city was hard down, and no one knew where the magic “big red switch” was to turn it back on. Instead, it appeared that it was all fatally interlinked like a circle of dominoes. Each critical service was dependent on another couple to get back on line, and none could be easily kick started. From time to time we ran into individuals who claimed to have the answers, but the sad truth was that the utilities infrastructure had been in a death spiral before we came and gave its last gasp as we arrived.

Governing 101

My battle journal notes dated 10 April 2003 lists a plethora of deduced tasks to include “power on,” “more interpreters,” “water/sewage on,” “trash pick up,” “locate police/police authority,” “open schools,” “destroy SSO/fedayeen,” ad infinitum with the final comment, “Who is government? What is government? Where is government?” The answers turned up in our shaving mirrors.

So like good Marines we confidently waded in and figured it out as we went along. The staff met early the morning after liberation and conducted a mission analysis. Effectively our mission was to run a city with a battalion. Of course, several other battalions, regiments, and the division were conducting the same analysis. As a true testament to the trust our leaders had in us, all of the battalions were allowed to create their solutions with only the most general mission tasking and guidance from above. But every option for support was offered and taken. The dilemma was that our rapid push to Baghdad left us barely able to support ourselves with basic necessities, let alone a city of 5 million. But the last thing we could afford to do was to suck off

the already overtaxed local infrastructure as parasites.

We were very fortunate to have a particularly talented crew working on our solution set. I had a brilliant operations officer, a well-seasoned and savvy executive officer, very creative staff officers, and a group of exceptionally experienced company commanders who averaged over 18 months in command, in addition to a battalion of incredibly creative Marines, soldiers and sailors. This talented pool dissected the mission into digestible pieces and created, on the spot, a very effective “battlefield organization” and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) for controlling our area of responsibility (AOR).

Their first product was a list of 21 critical priority information requirements (PIRs) that we placed into the hands of every small unit leader or individual with the potential for direct contact with the local population or environment. These PIRs were our metrics for determining crisis areas in the city where we could direct critical assets. They included the condition of key utilities, location and condition of hospitals, identification of local leaders (non-Ba’ath Party), traffic flow, commercial activities, religious affiliations, ethnicity of neighborhoods and their opinion of us, opening of political party offices, status of local schools, and criminal activities. In addition, we also tracked a healthy list of threat-related information requirements as we continued to dismantle the Ba’ath /SSO/fedayeen insurgents as well as other potential sensitive sites. These collection requirements were reported out every night during staff meetings and analyzed in depth by our S-2 (intelligence). Together they provided us a very raw but telling look at our AOR and allowed us to allocate resources, track trends, and focus on what we determined were centers of gravity. We also rapidly discovered that in this environment, literally every Marine, sailor, and soldier was a collector, as they were in the environment and able to fill in the blanks on our report to great effect.

Our next product was to rebuild the staff to reflect our changing mission. With our attacks focused on smaller targets, we no longer needed the robust fire support control staff we did in our fight through Iraq. That left a group of very talented Marines to reassign as our battalion-level civil-military operations center (CMOC). In short order our air officer became the head of our CMOC with all our forward air controllers/forward observers and their communicators as his staff. Now instead of processing fires they became city managers processing our reports and going out as contact teams to trouble areas to find solutions. This was a powerful tool. It also allowed our CAG teams, who were our duty experts on civil affairs, to focus their efforts on the most critical issues without becoming tied down in the more mundane concerns our CMOC handled. Our higher and adjacent headquarters organized in the same fashion providing great continuity between the various CMOC’s.

We also substantially reorganized and retasked our intelligence staff. Gone were the large enemy formations we had been tracking. Now the enemy consisted of disorganized, fleeting former regime members that our small units were doing very well tracking using the locals and HETs on site. But our requirements for analysis of the city’s population needs, organizations, and affiliations were daunting. That changed dramatically the methodology and organization of our intelligence staff. With a battalion of collectors, and reams of raw information coming in, they organized into a joint intelligence center that combined the talents of our CMOC, PsyOps detachment, CAG, and HETs into an analytical body that could relate the information for trends and targets. This quickly refined intelligence became the lifeblood for our operations as we “fought” the city’s problems in order to win it back for the population and encourage our popular support.

Within the battalion we reorganized our combat formations to complement the city. Each rifle company was assigned a zone to provide security and “govern” like a borough. They then assigned platoons smaller zones to operate from in combined action program-type linkages with the locals. We set up “firm bases” within large facilities like the Baghdad University for each company to use as a logistics/beddown site. The firm bases allowed commanders to run continuous operations in their zones with at least a reinforced platoon providing presence, while still being able to rest and refit the remainder of the company. This was important because our preferred tactic was foot mobile patrolling that we called “saturation patrolling.” Firm bases allowed us to always have an alert unit on patrol or conducting operations, while resting small units were kept away from the public eye. In order to increase our coverage we turned weapons company into a provisional rifle company, although we used the combined antiarmor teams as a quick reaction force (QRF) throughout

the AOR. Our headquarters and services company provided security for one of our firm bases and also rotated in and out of QRF duty.

Tactically, our operations consisted of random saturation patrols to collect information and keep our sector secure. These foot mobile patrols were very approachable by the locals, and we facilitated this contact by pushing interpreters down to the platoon level. This allowed us to get tips from the locals on threats, as well as to gain situational awareness on our collection requirements. If we got actionable information on a threat, the company would often simply handle it internally, informing the battalion combat operational center as they were going in so we could position the QRF to support if things went awry. This resulted in an extremely high tempo of operations that yielded great success against the disorganized and overwhelmed former regime combatants. We paid a price sometimes from dry holes, but by allowing the attacks to be executed at the lowest level possible, these misses had little effect on our overall operations. At the same time our aggressive actions gave a very positive sign to the locals that we were serious about tearing down all of the remnants of Saddam's regime, further engendering their support.

Our rules of engagement (ROE) also changed rapidly. Prior to our entry into Baghdad we had discussed at length the necessity to rapidly adjust to the changes of entering a dense urban environment where our actions could easily turn the population against us. The 1st Marine Division's now famous credo, "no better friend, no worse enemy" lent itself to this transition. We started to discuss more and more the requirements for positive identification (ID) of all targets and limiting weapons effects to decrease collateral damage. Our higher headquarters was also tailoring back the ROE and TTP to meet emerging realities. Military vehicles turned lights back on at night to match civilian traffic. Vehicle checkpoints used long, serpentine entry points to reduce "runners." Shoot first engagements were replaced by more forgiving peacetime ROE with graduated levels of force. These changes were critical to winning the population and avoiding our own fratricide in a densely populated environment.

Another facet of modifying our ROE was changing from a "no rules" combat mentality in how we drove, acted, and talked in front of the local community. If we were the government then we needed to set the example vice join in the anarchy. Where possible, our Marines obeyed traffic rules. They avoided social taboos like relieving themselves in public, using foul language, or leering and pointing weapons at innocents. Uniforms were policed up from combat standards to a more professional look. Sunglasses were removed to reveal eyes, considered an important "mirror to the soul" for the Iraqis. Washing became an influence operation as we tried to "humanize" our warriors in the eyes of our new public. Where tactically possible, we shed body armor to look less threatening and less threatened. There were hundreds of these small details that we incorporated, but their sum total was powerful. It added normality to the community and created a level of respect that bullying would not.

Our last major reorganization involved all of the commanders. Having inherited the yoke of local government, we now needed to match that responsibility with some good old-fashioned politicking. It meant all of us going out and meeting the locals, sitting in on their neighborhood meetings, and becoming a physical presence in their lives as a sign of stability and control. Effectively, the population had been subjected to 35 years of "big brother" type omnipotent tyranny from Saddam. Perhaps they were free, but their comfort zone was to have a strong leader to look to for direction. Add to this the utter confusion of little or no utilities, many suddenly irrelevant jobs, no media after having it force fed, no phones, and the complete absence of the usual repressive bureaucracy. This resulted in a tremendous feeling of isolation and instability for the population. Many simply stayed home fearing the great unknown—who was us in most cases. So we started spending our days traveling around like incumbents in an election year, meeting our "constituents," and building up our popular support. It took some getting used to, but the effect was dramatic. Senior officers shaking hands in the street? Accepting criticism? Pitching in to help neighborhoods? Destroying the invincible Saddam regime? Amazing to the locals, but very welcome.

This Could Be Working

The TTP listed above helped to get us on the road to recovery and to provide a way ahead in a confused and chaotic environment. But it was impressive to see the reorganization of the city under this influence.

Again, we were not unique. The other battalions, as well as our regimental headquarters and the division, were all making similar adjustments as the city/country came under more control. Within a week of liberation the markets were open again in our sector, many were going back to work, there was a new police force reorganizing, hospitals were reopening, and most impressively, neighborhoods were organizing their first attempts at representative government councils. These nascent steps toward democracy generated tremendous excitement in the population despite their concerns over their lack of critical services.

But, at the same time, we were starting to see the enormity of the challenge offered by the political transformation of a diverse city like Baghdad. Like most of the world's great cities, Baghdad is made up of a wide compilation of cultures and ethnic groups. I think we understood that we would find divisions like Sunni and Shiá neighborhoods, but we were surprised to find large boroughs of Palestinians, Syrians, Armenians, and Christians, as well as smaller communities of even more variety. The locals told us that Saddam purposely created these segregated pockets of division in order to keep the various communities in check. Whether this Machiavellian construct was deliberate was academic as we now were faced with the seeds of ethnic tension in a no longer totalitarian setting. The issue was to manage these groups fairly without showing any overt favoritism, but effectively use their stabilizing influence to promote security and popular support. We found ourselves operating more in the political realm as we balanced competing groups seeking influence in the post regime power vacuum. These early experiences would become invaluable lessons in our later stability operation missions.

From Embedded to Dreaded

A final component of the transition period was the sea change in our relationship with the media. During the combat phase we experienced unprecedented media access via the embedded reporters. The First Team had a television crew from Cable News Network and two newspaper reporters (*The Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune*). Our relationship with them followed the same pattern as most units in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), going from a wary start as we sized each other up to all out mutual acceptance as we shared the battle across Iraq. By Baghdad there were few secrets as we had each proved trustworthy under extreme circumstances.

But that relationship came to an abrupt end as we transitioned out of combat operations. Media home offices were eager to point their valuable news crews at more focused and "newsworthy" events than the seemingly mundane affairs of security operations. So our "embeds" were quickly extracted and joined large press pools downtown in the Palestine Hotel. As the embeds withdrew, we encountered geometrically increasing numbers of free roaming "freelancers" out to find the story of the day. They had come to Baghdad on the coattails of the advancing forces, having been shut out of most of the combat units during the fighting. These freelancers had a completely different view of the war and our occupation of Baghdad, and a wide range of agendas that matched their parent media and national diversity. They also were fond of flaunting their perceived freedom of access across the still unstable city without the battlefield sense of the embeds and with credentials that were as minimal as the letters "TV" taped on their sport utility vehicles and calling cards for an IDs. Handling these droves of swarming reporters became a major consideration that was as much a security issue as a public relations and information operation. Although some were vetted and certified by our higher headquarters, the sheer numbers of reporters and no opportunity to control their ingress into the city left this a constant problem.

In retrospect, I believe that this was an opportunity lost for both the media and our military. Prematurely severing the embed linkage removed the opportunity to report on the reawakening of the country and the metamorphosis of an exclusively combat force into a reconstruction force. While this may not have first appeared to be a newsworthy subject, I would argue that it has become a major story of late. In later operations the division was very successful in dealing with freelancers by attaching public affairs office noncommissioned officer (U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps combat correspondents) to battalion task forces and by using our PsyOps to monitor the messaging we were delivering in the local and international media.

Handoff and Rehack

On 20 April 2003, Easter morning, we handed off our sector of Baghdad to several units from the U.S.

Army. We accomplished the relief in place (RIP) in about 3 days, emphasizing “right side/left side” type interactions down to the platoon level. This process had relieving small unit leaders accompanying our live patrols, raids, and security operations as observers, followed by our small unit leaders accompanying their first operations in their new zone. We also conducted more formal turnovers of our local intelligence on our sector to the respective staffs, as well as the physical turnover of obstacles, firm bases, and static support. The most unique portion of this RIP was our focus on passing along our assessment of the political and social architecture of our city, as well as detailed surveys of the local infrastructure. Key to this was the sharing of the names and introductions to the key local leaders and contacts we had developed. These interpersonal contacts were invaluable pathways to the support of the local community and the maintenance of critical balance between competing groups.

We withdrew to an assembly area well south of Baghdad and awaited our next mission. That mission would start 4 days later as we occupied and conducted security/stabilization operations in the 1.2 million person Governate of Najaf in south-central Iraq. Our experiences in Baghdad would prove critical in our next mission, and we spent the intervening days reviewing our lessons learned and incorporating them into our new operating plans and standing operating procedures. The Najaf mission will be the next article in this series.

Lessons Learned

- Transition operations are key to long-term success but should not be exclusively a military show. Marines can do it militarily, even politically for a very short time, but what is needed is the rapid replacement of a civil power vacuum with civil solutions. This is no time for amateurs and promises. Bring in the pros from Dover right behind the attack for a lasting peace.

- Invest in critical transition forces. For example, our PsyOps teams needed the capability to immediately saturate the local media with our message but could not do it because all they had were loudspeakers and leaflets. They need portable radio/television transmitters in transition/stability operations. You can lead a population but only if you can effectively get your message and personality out to citizens. In urban settings even the poorest have some access to electronic media, and its use provides immediate influence over the population. Other critical military skills sets were HETs, translators (especially U.S. citizens who are expatriots of the host country), civil affairs, engineers, lawyers, and military police.

- We need to better plan for actions and effects during the combat phase that will produce the best complement of subsequent transition and stability operations. I think this was attempted in varying degrees by higher and adjacent commands, but there did not seem to be a unity of purpose throughout the theater in defining a cohesive political end state fully supported in all phases of the operation. As a result, I believe that postconflict operations were complicated by how we waged the combat phase.

- Be ready for instantaneous transition. Don't stop being a warrior, but be ready to dual hat as a mayor/city manager/borough chief. Press flesh, kiss the babies, and kill the enemy.

- Read more than field manuals. Understand the local culture, political history, and the basics to managing a successful government. The *Small Wars Manual* is certainly a great start, but Machiavelli's *Prince*, *The Articles of Confederation*, *The Constitution*, *The Federalist Papers*, international political journals/texts, area histories, and cultural studies like *The Arab Mind* (Raphael Patai) and the Koran are just as critical as Sun Tsu and Clausewitz in transition operations.

- Be creative. You have many untapped secret weapons in your units. Create special skills lists prior to combat that identify your Marines with past experience as electricians, oil workers, heavy machinery operators, firefighters, police, political campaigns workers, media creators, etc. Look at opportunities to build unique nonmilitary skills during peacetime operations that will be key enablers later. Few of these investments are wasted.

- Experience is a critical asset in the unique environment of transition operations, just as it is in combat. Foreign deployments with maximum international contact, bilateral training, and any opportunity for interagency and multinational interactions are invaluable. And when those opportunities are not there, the next best thing is to read about someone else's experiences to gain their lessons for free.

In summary, if we accept Clausewitz's dictum that "war is politics by other means" then we must also accept that war and military actions are simply phases and enablers for the entire political solution to international crises. That being the case, we must be able to "work the seams" by ensuring that military operations are embedded in political strategies in order to complement and facilitate national objectives. Transition operations represent the operational merger between high-intensity combat operations and nonmilitary solutions to a political crisis. Our epiphany was discovering just how far down that linkage goes and just how politically astute our "strategic corporals" must be. In a perfect world there exists a detailed political/military plan for any crisis that would address these transition periods with the early insertion of critical civil stabilizing assets. The reality is that most conflicts are come as you are occasions where the price of early success will be ad hoc transition operations flowing into long-term stability operations using predominantly military forces. And, as the lead quote in this article states, these are "normal and frequent operations" for our Marine Corps, so we need to be very good at them. What do you do for an encore? Play well enough that you never need to come back.